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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the problems of reading instruction as a major challenge in education, Educational Professions Development Act (EPDA) Institutes of recent years have funded several programs to develop new methods and materials for teaching in inner-city schools. The project reported here is an EPDA Institute for teachers of disadvantaged children in the cities of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Wheeling, West Virginia, and Youngstown, Ohio. The program emphasized equally the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Two summer workshops and a year of on-site supervision in the classroom provided suggestions for developing programs to test in the classrooms. During the winter session, the Institute staff visited with the participants in the classroom, providing an opportunity for staff and participants to cooperate in testing and developing reading programs. Experiences of a workshop nature were offered the second summer to provide participants an opportunity to individualize their programs. Workshop experiences included: a materials-method area; an interpersonal experiences area; a media area which used video-taped equipment as a means of examining classroom interactions; and, materials and methods evaluation. (Author/JM)

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A Tri-Univer – City Project for Teachers in Inner-City Schools

by

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Abstract:

Describes EPDA Institute for teachers of disadvantaged children in the cities of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Wheeling, West Virginia; and Youngstown, Ohio. Program emphasized equally the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Two summer workshops and a year of on-site supervision in the classroom provided suggestions for developing programs to test in the classrooms. During the winter session the Institute staff visited with the participants in the classroom providing an opportunity for staff and participants to cooperate in testing and developing reading programs. Experiences of a workshop nature were offered the second summer to provide participants an opportunity to individualize their programs. Workshop experiences included a materials-methods area, interpersonal experiences area and media area which used video-taping equipment as a means of examining classroom interactions, and materials, and methods evaluation.

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A Tri-Univer-city Project for Teachers in Inner-City Schools

The problems of instructing inner-city children in reading have been of great concern to educators in recent years. The traditional programs of reading instruction have not been successful or appropriate to inner-city children (if indeed, they were to most children in this time of rapid change). Children's reading achievement levels have fallen further and further behind expectations as they advanced in school years. Teachers have experienced great frustration in teaching groups where few children were able to read the materials provided and where most instructional programs have been oriented to competency in reading as a necessity to obtaining knowledges. Recognizing the problems of reading instruction as a major challenge in education, the EPDA Institutes of recent years have funded several programs to develop new methods and materials for teaching in inner-city schools.

The city of Pittsburgh, qualifying as an inner-city school with the typical urban problems has a unique challenge, in that it also is located on the northern fringes of the Appalachia area, a rural and semi-rural area recognized by the government as another target area of economic and educational concern.

Recognizing this challenge, educators from Chatham College, Carlow College (formerly Mount Mercy) and the University of Pittsburgh

met in 1969 to plan ways that a coordinated effort could be made by these three schools to develop programs appropriate to the needs of reading teachers in the Pittsburgh area.

With the merging of these three Institutions a unique blending of facilities and staffs was accomplished. The faculty of Chatham College, a private women's college had already established an outstanding program of teacher education involving strong public school-college cooperation. Carlow College, also a private church-related women's college, in its campus school had developed a strong laboratory set-up for training teachers and also had established excellent relationships for training and developing programs in several inner-city public and parochial schools. The University of Pittsburgh Reading and Language Arts Department with a strong emphasis on graduate level education, contributed the experience and knowledges in clinical work and methods of working with children functioning below capacity in reading.

As discussions and plans for the proposal developed it was decided that, rather than concentrate only in the Pittsburgh area, there would be value in expanding the area of concern to include other urban centers in the Tri-State district. If the problems of Pittsburgh were unique to this city, the inclusion of other cities would broaden the program and offer an opportunity for comparison. Therefore, it was decided to include Wheeling, West Virginia and Youngstown, Ohio public school systems, in the project. In addition, the diocesan schools in all three cities were invited to participate as many of them served children in inner-city areas.

Thus, the proposal as finally submitted included many interesting combinations. The project sponsors included two small highly regarded private women's colleges, an urban University Reading Department with a major commitment to graduate education and clinical work. The participating school districts included the well-known steel city of Pittsburgh, with its inner-city target areas uniquely separated from each other by the topography of Pittsburgh into pockets, some heavily black, others white with strong ethnic backgrounds creating problems in one area which might differ rather strikingly from those in another. Wheeling, West Virginia, in the heart of the Ohio County School District was faced with the problems of much of Appalachia. A trip to Wheeling by car reveals the ravages of strip miners close upon the city limits. School bond votes were of major concern to educators as the need for new buildings became more pressing. The Youngstown, Ohio, school district presented still other challenges. Economic problems there were similar to those encountered in the heavy industry areas of Pittsburgh, but the sprawling nature of the school district in this city found the target schools in areas as varied as the traditional "inner-city" school in the accepted sense of that term to schools which could be considered as nearly rural on the outskirts of the city.

What kind of program could be developed to use the resources of the three different college staffs, three different urban areas with different problems, populations and a touch of semi-rural Appalachia thrown in? It was decided that the first summer's session

should have a strong emphases on developing awarenesses in teachers. Based on studies by Clark[1] and Davidson and Lang[2] a great problem for children in inner-city areas seems to be teacher attitude. The problem was to make teachers aware of their feelings and expectations for their children and find ways to enable them to see the effect of these feelings and expectations on the childrens' progress.

The program participants were given a series of experiences in the psychology, sociology and anthropology of the inner-city child. A program of Afro-American history was also incorporated. For many of the participants, the challenges provided by being exposed to black educators who challenged, probed, confronted and in general, "said it like it is", was an alarming and often painful experience. Righteous indignation and anger ran high as a series of affective experiences challenged accepted beliefs and values of a group of teachers and administrators, from public and parochial schools, ranging in age from their early twenties to late fifties and in experience from two to over twenty-five years.

In addition, a series of experiences with methods and materials of reading, in conjunction with actual classroom experience was also taking place. Materials appropriate to inner-city children by reason of relevance and appeal were examined and experimented with. Programs for incorporation into classrooms were developed for the fall. Assumption being what it is, college instructors were shaken to discover that there were teachers in the group who had never grouped children for reading instruction because they had never heard of it. The presence

of other teachers who had developed totally individualized programs of instruction provided tremendous benefit to the group with ideas and materials.

As summer ended, a somewhat shaken, greatly challenged group of educators moved back into their school districts determined to experiment with new ideas. At this point, emphasis changed in the program. The program faculty now became learners in the classrooms of participants who developed and demonstrated new programs in their classrooms. Throughout the fall and winter, classroom visitations, small-group and individual discussions and group sharing sessions were conducted in the three cities.

Development of the program for the second summer on campus emphasized the need for coordination of the results of the previous summer's experiences and the expansion and development of the materials and programs from the winter classroom experiences. To facilitate a closure type of summer program, three major workshop or experience areas were developed.

Experience A centered on materials and program development. A workshop center of materials was established at Carlow College and participants spent their time there developing manipulable materials for student use in reading, as this kind of material had been found to be particularly valuable with children who liked to be able to manage and handle their environments. In addition, commercial materials were made available for evaluation for use in inner-city schools. Some classroom observation was part of this experience so participants could

field-test newly prepared materials. Since several of the participants were reading supervisors or remedial reading instructors, an opportunity was provided for them to work with an advisor developing programs for reading instruction in their schools.

A second experience area emphasized continuation and further refinements of the affective awarenesses developed in the previous summer. Interaction experiences included a creative drama workshop, experiences in non-verbal communication, role-play experiences simulating a variety of school situations, and many task-group sessions on the problems and solutions for introducing new programs into the schools. Many of the participants expressed the need to know how to influence administrators and other teachers as well as parents to accept new ideas. Much of the frustration and indignation of the previous summer fell into perspective as the groups worked through this experience.

A third workshop experience attempted to coordinate the new materials-methods ideas with the affective growth through the use of media. At various times as many as five sets of video-tape equipment were available and three sets were on hand all summer for participants' use. During the spring as many participants as possible were taped in their classrooms demonstrating materials, methods, problems, and successes. These tapes were viewed by the teacher involved and interesting or educational segments chosen for close examination and sharing by the group. In this way, direct sharing of participant ideas by demonstration was possible. Other groups developed role-play situations and video-taped them for inservice programs and parent meetings. Several

lessons were taped for class instruction. The video-tape equipment was moved all over the campus taping interesting materials, presentations, group interaction activities. At one point, video-tapes were made of video-tapes being made and examined for the interactions involved to determine the effectiveness of the group process. One group of particularly interested participants developed a video-tape of the entire Institute program for presentation as part of the final report of the Institute.

The continuation of an Institute over such a long period of time and with such diverse groups in widely separated geographic areas presented great challenges but comments by the participants seemed to indicate the importance of such concerns.

"It helped me to realize I was not the only person with serious problems and that people from several cities were facing such similar problems. The ideas that came from another group which had solved a problem similar to mine wer tremendously helpful."

From another teacher; "I went home last summer so very angry and frustrated and feeling it was a complete waste, but all winter long, I found challenges popping before me from the summer and I realized I had been unaware of the needs of many of my kids. I guess you might say I started having 'insights' and I realized I had to change myself and my program. Then this summer gave me the opportunity to come back and 'make sense' of it all. For me, the greatest experience was the day I realized I had 'made it' with my students because I was able to hear them and I had the tools to respond to their needs and isn't

that, after all, what teaching is all about?"

And, to paraphrase, for those of us who participated in this project "Isn't that what this particular EPDA Institute was all about?"

1. Clark, Kenneth B., Education in Depressed Areas, (ed.) A. Harry Passow, New York; Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1963, p. 148.

2. Davidson, Helen and Lang, Gerhard, "Children's Perceptions of Their Teacher's Feelings toward Them Related to Self Perception, School Achievement and Behavior," Journal of Experimental Education, 39 116; December, 1960.